NICARAGUA AND THE MOSQUITO COAST.

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EVERY once in a while something happens to rouse Americans out of that complaisant frame of mind which has become habitual, and in which they have come to regard their imperial domain, bounded by the Great Lakes and the Rio Grande to the North and South, and the broad ocean to the East and West, as a sort of little world all to themselves, whence they could look out upon the doings beyond with a patronizing half-humorous indifference, as upon things in which they had no possible concern. A few months ago the shock was supplied by the unheralded supplication from a small island nation out in the Pacific to be taken under the broad wing of the "bird of freedom," and we awoke to the fact that perhaps in spite of ourselves and our national prejudices the logic of events had extended our zone of political influence far beyond our supposed definitive boundaries. Now comes Nicaragua, her warring factions having concluded an armistice, and asks Uncle Sam to arbitrate, with suggestions even of the advisability of an American protectorate; and it is quite possible that upon a little reflection we may discover that this fussy little republic is as essentially an integral portion of the United States of the future as if it lay between Chicago and Denver. Possessing the most practicable water way over the isthmus which divides New York from San Francisco, it may well be that the increasing necessity of a purely American ocean highway between these two ports must soon render inevitable a political predominance on our part which shall amount to virtual sovereignty over these regions.

But for a trifling incident it would never have occurred to me to go to Nicaragua. Excepting as an eligible site for a canal and

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don, 1891, dedicated to Prof. Huxley; H. E. Ryle, Hulsean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, The Early Narratives of Genesis, London, 1892, preface, pp. vii–ix, pp. 7, 9, 11; Rev. G. M. Searle, of the Catholic University, Washington, article in the Catholic World, November, 1892, pp. 223, 227, 229, 231. For the statement from Keble College, see Rev. Mr. Illingworth, in Lux Mundi. For Bishop Temple, see citation in Laing. For the most complete and admirable acceptance of the evolution theory as lifting Christian doctrine and practice to a higher plane, with suggestions for a new theology, see two sermons by Archdeacon Wilson, of Manchester, S. P. C. K., London, and Young & Co., New York, 1893; and for a characteristically lucid statement of the most recent development of evolution doctrines, and the relations of Spencer, Weissmann, Galton, and others to them, see Lester F. Ward's Address as President of the Biological Society, Washington, 1891; also, recent articles in the leading English reviews. For a brilliant glorification of evolution by natural selection as a doctrine necessary to the highest and truest view of Christianity, see Prof. Drummond's Chautauqua Lectures, published in The British Weekly, London, from April 20 to May 11, 1893.

FIG. 1.—BLUEFIELDS.

as the scene of Filibuster Walker's bold exploit, the country had never been associated with my thoughts, and canals and filibusters were not in my line. I had perhaps an adumbration of centipeds and scorpions and of a people in a chronic state of revolution, which surely is not an alluring mental picture. It happened, however, that I had made preparations to go with an expedition for an extended tour of the West Indies, and was all ready to depart, when at the last moment the project was indefinitely postponed. Trunks and gripsacks were neatly packed and good-byes had been duly bidden, and here I was without any destination. In this perplexity a letter was handed me bearing an unfamiliar post-mark. Hastily tearing open the envelope, I read:

"BLUEFIELDS, NICARAGUA, *April 5, 1893.*

"MY DEAR OLD BOY: You have been wondering, no doubt, not to have heard from me all these years, and your surprise will be greater to hear from me out of this strange quarter of the globe. . . . Well, my boy, I've been at work, hard at work, and, as the world would say, I've prospered. . . . I am working a very valuable grant, covering one hundred square miles. The bottoms are rich in timber and the uplands abound with gold. Native help is plentiful and can be hired for a song and sixpence, and the mahogany can be floated all the way to the coast. I want a congenial associate, and don't know any one with whom I would rather share my good fortune. At any rate, since I heard, by the rarest chance, that you were on the way to the Caribbean, you would find a run over to view the country well worth your while, etc. H."

Here was an impulse, all that was needed—so ho! and away for Nicaragua!

THE MOSQUITOS.—The 10th of May, 1893, found us aboard a little schooner from Greytown bound for Bluefields, the capital of that singular and little-known people the Mosquito Indians.

The portion of the Caribbean littoral commonly known as the Mosquito Coast, but more accurately called the "Mosquito Reservation," is a strip of land about two hundred miles in length extending northward from the Rama River to the Rio Huesco, and backward from the sea about forty miles; the western boundary being an astronomical line along the meridian of longitude 84° 15′.

The so-called Mosquito Indians are by no means a homogeneous people. The interior river districts are inhabited by true Indians of various tribes and languages, agricultural in their habits—if such a thing as agriculture can be spoken of in this land of spontaneous vegetation and perennial summer. The coast

lands, which along their whole length are indented with a series of shallow lagoons separating them from the main sea, are inhabited by a mixed race in whose veins African and Indian blood are striving for the ascendency, with a dash of white blood infused

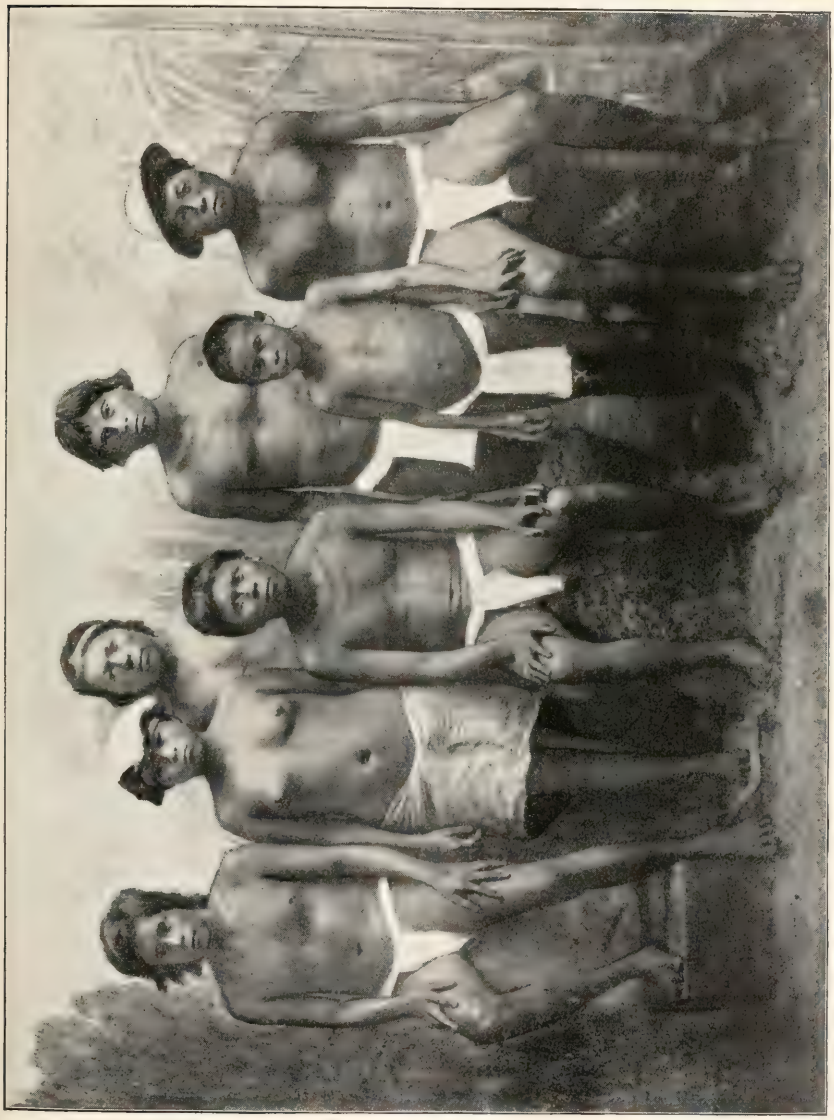

FIG. 2.—MOSQUITO INDIANS.

by buccaneers and Jamaica traders of the olden times. In the government of the community the people of the coast lands are the predominant element, the Indians farther in the interior being apathetic; nevertheless, the "chief," who is at the head of the government, is a full-blooded Indian. The official language,

and that generally spoken along the coast, is the English tongue. The Mosquito state is an autonomy under the sovereignty of Nicaragua, but to understand its unique position in the family of nations it would be necessary to give an outline of its more recent history. Such a sketch would scarcely prove of interest, and would far exceed the limits of this article.

Bluefields, the capital and only port of the Mosquito Reservation, gets its name from a famous old pirate of the past, called Bleevelt, the remains of whose stronghold—in an advanced state of decay—are still seen on a high promontory at the entrance of the harbor known as the "Bluff." The town proper lies about six miles from the sea, and is reached by crossing a large lagoon of such shallowness that only after much tugging, pushing, and pulling in small boats of the lightest draught is the passenger landed at the Government wharf. Seen from the lagoon, the town presents a pleasant picture. Seated upon comparatively high ground, the luscious green of the luxuriant vegetation in which it is framed runs quite down to the water's edge, while here and there a stately palm or cocoanut tree, its leaves nodding lazily in the almost imperceptible breeze, gives the landscape that calm, dreamy look so characteristic of tropical life. There is but one street in the town (King Street) leading up from the wharf. On this street are its few stores and trade shops. The rest of the settlement—covering an area of two square miles—is scattered about, wheresoever the householders willed it, without plan or reference to streets and lanes. At the time of my visit the town contained three horses and two carts or wagons, so it is evident that streets would be of less use for traffic than for the sake of symmetry, and Sambo idea of symmetry is an unknown quantity. The houses of Bluefields, with the exception of a few native "shacks," are built of lumber brought from the United States, and are similar in style of architecture to those found in small American villages. All buildings are erected on posts, and raised two or three feet above the ground, to avoid the wet and mud of the rainy season. The population, numbering about fifteen hundred, is composed principally of the descendants of Jamaica negroes, with a sprinkling of cross-breed Indians, Spaniards, and negroes; these are known as "Sambos."

Bluefields and Bananas.—Such as it is, Bluefields owes its prosperity chiefly to American enterprise and capital. The increasing demand in the States for bananas, and the proximity of the Mosquito country to New Orleans (the journey being only four days by steamer), induced some Americans of a speculative turn to explore the country, with a view to supplying the demand for the fruit. Their ventures were successful beyond expectation, the soil and climate being peculiarly adapted for banana grow-

ing, and to-day hundreds of beautiful plantations line the river banks for many miles, producing an average of forty thousand bunches per week, and Bluefields ships more of this fruit than any two other ports of the world. Among the signs of American influence is the appearance of the newspaper, a never-wanting adjunct to every well-regulated American embryo city. The paper, printed in English and issued weekly, is called the Bluefields Sentinel. It has quite a United States air about it, and is well pep-

FIG. 3.—THE MOSQUITO CHIEF AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL: 1, Robert Henry Clarence, chief; 2, Hon. Charles Patterson, vice president and guardian; 3, Hon. J. W. Cuthbert, attorney general and secretary to the chief; 4, Mr. J. W. Cuthbert, Jr., government secretary; 5, Mr. George Haymond, councilman and headman; 6, Mr. Edward McCrea, councilman and headman.

pered with advertisements. The spiritual and educational welfare of the community has been taken in hand by the "Moravian Mission," whose little churches and schools are scattered all over the territory, and on Sunday the single street of Bluefields is alive with churchgoers, who seem to be coming and going to and from religious service all day long.

The government of the Mosquito Reservation consists of the hereditary chief and an Executive Council, the members of the

Executive Council being elected by a General Council, and the latter in turn being appointed by the chief from among the "head men" of the tribe and representative inhabitants of the various districts of the country. The present chief, his Excellency Robert Henry Clarence, who, as above stated, is a full-blooded Mosquito Indian, is a handsome, intelligent, and well-educated young man of twenty or thereabouts, with a magnificent head of glossy black hair. The other government officials are nearly all descendants of Jamaica negroes, and perform their duties with becoming gravity and ease. Hon. Charles Patterson, the vice president, whose features betray some admixture of European blood, is also the guardian of the chief during his minority. The law of the land, by the Mosquito Constitution, is declared to be the common and statutory law of England, so far as the same can be made applicable and not inconsistent with local customs and the enactments of the chief and Council. Many of the young men who desire educational advantages better than the local schools afford are sent to Jamaica or even to England. The land laws are very liberal. Each head of a family is permitted to take six hundred and forty acres on a ninety-nine years' lease, for which he pays an annual rental of three cents an acre to the Government, equal to about fifteen dollars American gold. He is expected to pay, besides, the cost of surveying his "section," but beyond this there is no tax of whatever kind imposed, no matter how valuable the improvements he may make. Altogether the Mosquito people have made a considerable advance toward civilized life. The missionaries have not succeeded entirely in uprooting the superstitious practices among the lowest walks of the population, and the *obeah* or *obeaism*, a system of necromancy, by which ill luck can be averted and injuries done to your enemies, has still a powerful hold. The periodic "big drunk" of former times, when whole villages used to engage in wild orgies, is no longer a popular institution, although it is possible that individuals do not disdain to indulge in a periodic spree. The Mosquitos proudly and justly boast that for many years they have lived and maintained their institutions in peace, whereas the sovereign Republic of Nicaragua is constantly riven and torn by revolutions and strife. The state of culture described is found, however, only in the "cities" and mission stations. Away from these and in the jungles the people are still pure savages.

The chapter on roads in Mosquito is as brief and of the same tenor as the chapter on snakes in Iceland. The only means of communication are the rivers and lagoons; beyond these all is dense, impenetrable forest and jungle, interspersed here and there in the more northerly portions by grassy plains called savannas. The principal article of commerce, besides the banana, is

mahogany. This huge timber is cut by the Indians of the interior, and hauled and shoved toward a river in the immediate vicinity, thence floated in rafts of two or three logs, or often as a single tree, down to the coast. Most of the banana plantations are on the Bluefields or Escondido River. The mouth of the river is about a mile north of Bluefields, and the plantations begin about twenty miles above this point and thence cover its banks in almost unbroken continuity for some distance beyond the city of Rama, sixty miles up stream. To facilitate the handling and shipping of the fruit, the plantations are always close to the banks, and vary in depth from fifty to two thousand yards.

FIG. 4.—RAMA.

The steamer Hendy, an old Mississippi River boat, whose lightness of draught makes it well adapted for steaming about the shallow lagoons, plies regularly between Bluefields and Rama. Leaving the former place at seven o'clock in the morning, the trip to Rama begins by rounding a point of land called "Old Bank," a place which for a short time was the home of a small German colony. This settlement was abandoned after repeated trials and disasters; the unfortunate colonists being finally compelled to return to their native land, greatly reduced in number and weakened by disease, and after being harassed by the Spaniards and Indians. At this point the boat enters the Escondido

River. On each side the luxuriant and dense vegetation overhangs the water, a virgin jungle, whose somber shade the brightest sunlight fails to pierce. Flaming red herons rise and flutter or stand in comic solemnity watching us as we pass; gaudy macaws flash their flaring plumage among the leaves and utter hoarse cries as the boat wends its way; close to the shore, among the fallen trees and snags, huge alligators, innocent as yet of a knowledge of rifle ball or hunter, lift their ugly beaks in mute wonder at our intrusion upon their gloomy retreat. Indeed, a river trip is not necessary to see all this, a mile back of the town of Bluefields is the same impenetrable jungle. A meeting with a native tiger or jaguar is not an unusual occurrence in the outskirts, while in the rainy season, alligators from the lagoons are not too timid to carry off pigs and goats from the settlements.

After about twenty miles of steaming through those dark and gloomy channels, it is a pleasurable sensation to come upon the first clearing and see once more a sign of human activity. On every side are now evidences of thrift and industry. The picturesque houses of the planters, built of bamboo after the pattern of the native shacks and thatched with palm leaves, standing under the shade of tall cocoanut trees, make an ideal picture of tropic life. As the steamer lies to, for the purpose of landing supplies at many of the banana plantations, an excellent opportunity is given to study the manner of cultivation, if such it can be called. The only implement used by the cultivators is the machete, the universal native tool and weapon all in one; it is a rather long and broad knife, something between a broadsword and a cleaver in appearance. With the aid of this implement the native first clears the land of jungle and brush, each man being required to cut at least one "task" (twenty square yards) per day. Although this is only two or three hours' work, it is seldom that a native will do more than one task in a day. The natural inclination to work is of the faintest character. Nature has so bountifully provided all the necessaries of life that there would be no incentive to make money were it not for the passion for gambling, and a game of chance is the one thing the natives never seem too tired to engage in. The brush thus cleared is burned during the dry season and the ground is now ready for the young plants or shoots. These are "suckers" taken from older trees, and after planting them singly at distances of about eight feet apart, nothing further is required than occasionally to clear out the large weeds which will crop up between them. In two years the trees mature, reaching a height of ten to fifteen feet and bearing from one to three bunches each.

There is no such thing as a crop or a harvest as we understand the term with our northern possessions. Every day in the

year is seed time, every day is harvest time. Plants in various stages of maturity, plants in flower and in fruit and ready for the machete, stand side by side, and there is no winter to interrupt the process of vegetation. While the fruit is still quite green the plant is cut down, and the bunches being removed, these are carried to the river bank, where they are made into heaps and covered with the large leaves of the plant, so that the rain and sun may not unduly hasten the ripening. Only the largest bunches are reserved; the others are thrown into the river and left to drift away with the current.

THE HOUSE IN A TREE.—Rama is a town of about eight hundred inhabitants and, like Bluefields, is dependent chiefly upon the banana industry for its prosperity. It is situated right on the boundary line between the Mosquito Reservation and Nicaragua, and its population is a cross-breed of Spaniards and Indians. While at Rama I heard of a mysterious individual, a white man, who makes his home in a tree. Satisfying myself as to the substantial truth of the rumors, I determined to have a sight of the strange house of this eccentric person.

As the river steamer Hendy was to make a trip up the Rama River the following morning, passing the house in the tree, I accepted the invitation of Captain Tucker to accompany him. The captain was a typical Yankee, who had lived several years on the rivers of Nicaragua, and whose fund of information seemed inexhaustible. He kindly offered me his guidance to the house. After steaming several miles we came upon the "clearing" of Captain Henry Wilderson, for such is the name of the tree-dweller; and here, within a hundred yards of the river, stood this remarkable structure, its white painted sides and green window blinds making a striking object against the dark jungle surrounding it. Imagine a tall tree trunk nearly four feet in diameter and stripped of branches, rising fifty feet or more straight up into the air, and perched upon its summit this strange abode, looking for all the world like a huge lantern. It is said that Wilderson objects to visitors on curiosity bent, and a photographic camera pointed at the house would be quite apt to bring forth protests from the inmate, backed up if necessary by force and violence. Fortunately, on the day of our visit the captain was not at home, so our investigations were carried on without interruption. The tree upon which the house is built is a variety called the ebo; its wood is of great strength and hardness, and, as it would require days of work with an axe to fell it, Wilderson can feel quite safe on his lofty perch. The building is about twenty-five feet square and about the same in height. The tree runs completely through the center of the house to the roof. The first story is occupied by the kitchen; a sitting room and bedroom, with a small piazza facing the river, take

Fig. 5.—Banana Plantation.

up the next story; while the third story was intended for a bath-room and observatory. The whole is very solidly built of pine lumber. At each corner are heavy braces of timber reaching from the ground to the main floor, while four stout guy-ropes running from the house and fastened to adjacent trees assure the occupant additional safety against the strong winds which sometimes rage. To reach the house it is necessary to enter an elevator placed at the back of the tree. This is a simple contrivance, and consists of a small platform to which is attached a rope passing over a pulley in the kitchen. To pull one's self up requires but little exertion, as the weight of a person is balanced by a heavy counter-weight, which descends as the elevator rises by a hand-over-hand pull of the passenger, and in a few moments one is landed at the door opening into the structure. In descending, of course, the operation is reversed. The interior is furnished in very plain style and may be said to contain necessaries only; there is not the slightest attempt at ornament or decoration. The kitchen utensils are few and most of them of home manufacture; indeed, Nature in this country has supplied food in such form that cooking is a matter of secondary importance, and is not regarded as one of the serious affairs of the household. As rain falls almost continuously for nine months of the year, the house is not without its supply of water. This comes from the roof and is run into tanks conveniently placed within the house. Captain Wilderson, who is an old Louisiana planter, built his castle in a tree about three years ago, and it is said to have cost thirty-five hundred dollars. The oddity is the result of a theory which the captain has that germs of malarial fever are not as active at an elevation as they are near the ground. Wilderson is said to be hale and hearty, and in consequence thereof his theory has quite a respectable local standing.

Pearl City.—Travel about the rest of the reservation is not as easy as the trip to the banana district by the river steamer. The lagoons along the coast are not all connected by water, and to reach one from the other it is necessary to cut your way across the intervening land through the jungle. The swath thus cut with the machete may be said to answer a double purpose, as, besides enabling one to make progress, it leaves a trail by which one can return to the point of starting, thus diminishing the very serious consequences of becoming lost. As already stated, however, traveling is nearly all done by water. The inland water communication through the lagoons along the whole two hundred miles of coast is interrupted in only two places, and the rivers running into the interior are numerous. The native boats, which are large dugouts, called "pitpans," are hollowed out of trunks of the ceiba or silk-cotton tree. These trees when in bloom are a

novel spectacle. It is certainly something out of the common to see a gigantic tree, with a trunk five or six feet in diameter and eighty or ninety feet high, and sending out limbs as long and massive as an oak, yet bearing flowers like a rose bush. These

FIG. 6.—GATHERING BANANAS.

flowers are rich and variegated in color, but chiefly of a bright carnation. Viewed from beneath, they are scarcely visible; the fragrance is overpowering, and the ground is carpeted with their gay leaves and delicate petals. When seen from a little distance, the ceiba tree in bloom is one of the most splendid productions of Nature—a huge and brilliant bouquet, requiring a whole forest to supply the contrasting green. The wood of the ceiba is easily worked, and, moreover, is light and buoyant and not liable to split by exposure to the sun. It is these qualities which make it so valuable for building the different varieties of boats required on the coast. The boats are usually sent from the interior in a rough and partly finished condition, being simply dug out, the outside being left to be finished according to the taste and fancy of the future owner. The boats are commonly fifteen or twenty feet long and about two feet wide, but it is not unusual to meet them of much larger dimensions, sometimes reaching even the great length of one hundred feet. The ends rise gracefully from

the water, presenting an overhanging bow and stern exactly alike in shape. Although the natives paddle about in all kinds of seas and weather, to the novice the boats are most frail and cranky craft; the slightest demonstration is sufficient to careen them to the very verge of capsizing. When such an accident does happen, the natives, who are excellent swimmers, right the boat and, by dexterously shaking it from side to side, empty it of water, and then, jumping in, they will pursue their journey with the utmost complacency. They propel their canoes with large shovel-shaped paddles, which they work for hours without signs of fatigue.

Pearl Lagoon is the sheet of water immediately north of the lagoon of Bluefields. The two are separated by a neck of land known as "Haulover." Pearl City, the home of the chief, is situated on the banks of Pearl Lagoon, and is about thirty-five miles from Bluefields. Much of the journey is through dark, winding creeks, and nowhere on the trip, until the settlement at Pearl La-

FIG. 7.—LOADING BANANAS.

goon is reached, can the slightest trace of civilization be seen. Pearl City is a far prettier place than Bluefields, and is built on a prairie or savanna of some six square miles in extent. I was cordially received by Robert Henry Clarence, the Mosquito chief, who placed at my disposal one of his three horses, and I had

the pleasure of the company of his Excellency on a canter over the plain. The little chief proved a furious rider, and spurred his horse to a breakneck gait, so that I had the greatest difficulty to keep up with him. Jumping from his horse, he disappeared for a moment in the brush, and presently returned with some luscious pineapples, which he peeled and, cutting lengthwise, offered me to eat. Among the institutions at Pearl City is the brass band of fourteen pieces. The band is under the leadership of Mr. J. W. Cuthbert, Jr., the Secretary of the Executive Council of the Mosquito nation. The Sambos performed for our edification and to their own satisfaction for at least two hours. Among the tunes were some which I recognized as having done long service on our variety stage.

The genuine Mosquitos, although they number over six thousand, are rarely met with at the coast settlements. They do not care to observe the restrictions put upon them by the local authorities in clothing themselves. Scantiness of dress is characteristic of a true Mosquito Indian, and in the interior of the country they can be observed in all their natural simplicity of costume. It must be admitted that for this hot, moist climate this is not an unreasonable state of affairs. I was fortunate in securing pictures of a number of groups of natives, both of the true Mosquito and of the Sambo variety, and some of these, with a picture of a native "shack" or bamboo house, are shown in the illustrations. Besides the banana and mahogany, the Mosquito country has other valuable resources. In its northern portion the country has extensive savannas covered with luxuriant grass the whole year round, affording admirable opportunities for cattle-raising. This business is yet in its infancy, but promises to assume respectable proportions. Cotton blooms wild and will bear through the entire year; sugar cane will produce a crop every seven months; rice, every four months; and oranges, lemons, limes, pineapples, and a host of other fruit grow wild. The upper runs of the northern rivers and creeks have gold-bearing sand, and it is not impossible that some day the "Reserve" will take rank as a gold-producing country.

THE "amber and jade" mines of Upper Burma have been visited by Dr. Noettling, who has reported upon them to the Geological Survey of India. The "amber" is a fossil resin corresponding with that called burmite, fluorescent, looking like solidified kerosene oil, and darker and harder than ordinary amber. The "jade" is jadeite, worked in pit and quarry mines for forty miles along the bank of the Uru River and on the top of a plateau at Tammaw. The industry is a thriving one, employing five hundred men, and promises well for future more systematic and skilled development. White is the commonest color; green is rare; and some of the bowlders are red.